



The Sixty-ninth Season of
The William Nelson Cromwell and F. Lammot Belin
Concerts

National Gallery of Art
2,797th Concert

Håkon Austbø, pianist

Presented in honor of *Edvard Munch: Master Prints*
and in conjunction with “Norway Comes to Washington”

October 6, 2010
Wednesday, 12:10 pm
West Building Lecture Hall

Admission free

Program

Fartein Valen (1887–1952)

4 Klavierstücke, op. 22 (1937)

Nachtstück

Valse noble

Lied ohne Worte

Gigue

Klaus Egge (1906–1979)

Sonata no. 2 (Sonata Patética), op. 27 (1955)

Grave stentato; allegro appassionato

Canto etéreo

Finale: Quasi una Fantasia

Finn Mortensen (1922–1983)

Sonata, op. 7 (1956)

Quasi una Fantasia

Fuga

Rolf Wallin (b. 1957)

Seven Imperatives (2001)

Seek

Push

Sink

Spin

Stab

Lean

Quit

*This concert is made possible in part by assistance provided by the Royal
Norwegian Embassy*

The Musician

In 1974 London's *Daily Telegraph* described pianist Håkon Austbø as the "possessor of towering talent worthy of international recognition." Since then, critics from New York to Amsterdam have praised his unusual versatility and the originality of his repertoire. Of Norwegian origin, Austbø performed extensively in his homeland before continuing his studies at the Paris Conservatoire and the École Normale de Musique. In 1970 he was the first non-French person to win the "Concours National de la Guilde Française des Artistes Solistes" in Paris. The following year he gained international attention when a unanimous jury awarded him first prize in the Olivier Messiaen Competition for Contemporary Music in Royan, France. Austbø furthered his studies at the Juilliard School of Music in New York, as well as in London and Munich. He was a prize winner at the 1974 International Munich Competition (in piano duo with Marina Horak); the 1975 Ravel Competition in Paris; and, as a member of Trio du Nord, of the 1975 UNESCO International Rostrum in Bratislava. Based in the Netherlands for more than thirty years, Austbø has recently returned to his native country and continues to enjoy an extensive solo career throughout Asia, Europe, and the United States.

The winner of three Norwegian Grammy awards, an Edison award, and a *Classic CD* award for "best available recording," Austbø has recorded major works of Alexander Scriabin; Olav Anton Thommessen's setting of the Norse melodrama *Edda-Da* with actress Juni Dahr; piano works by Brahms, Janáček, Satie, and Schumann; and the complete songs of Olivier Messiaen with soprano Ingrid Kappelle. His most recent recordings include the complete piano solo works of Debussy and Grieg and Messiaen's *Oiseaux exotiques*.

Austbø received the prize of the Norwegian music critics in 1989 and was chosen "Performer of the Year" in Norway in 1992. In 2003 he received the prestigious Grieg Prize. In addition to his intense performing schedule, he is professor of piano at the University of Stavanger.

Program Notes

The exhibition *Edvard Munch: Master Prints* brings together nearly sixty of Munch's most important prints to show how his persistent experimentation and virtuosic handling of woodcut, lithography, and intaglio endowed different impressions of his primary motifs with new meanings. Munch is renowned for his haunting portrayals of love, alienation, jealousy, and death—universal human experiences that he filtered through events in his own life. By manipulating color, line, texture, and pictorial details, he reworked these images in multiple print variations, continually renewing their power to express his artistic goals. The exhibition remains on view at the Gallery until October 31, 2010.

Edvard Munch's experiments with painting and printmaking techniques place him at the forefront of the development of modern expressionism. In *The Sick Child* from 1886 (National Gallery, Oslo), Munch attacks the surface—scoring, incising, scraping, and abrading the paint—fatiguing the canvas until the forms in the painting, most especially the head of his dying sister Sophie, appear to be disintegrating before our eyes. Tied to the poignancy of the theme, Munch's technique reinforces the subjectivity of the scene—the sense of the artist/brother trying to hold on to the image of his sister to whom he was devoted.

Munch's personal approach to painting involved not only the above-mentioned abrasive and kinetic techniques, but also thinning paint to encourage it to run across the surface and respond to gravity. Often he allowed bare canvas to show through in a finished work and left changes made during his creative process. Munch frequently placed his completed paintings outdoors (especially in winter) to “weather.”

As a printmaker, Munch responded strongly to the “primitive” quality of Paul Gauguin's woodcuts. He found much to admire in Gauguin's art and his own woodcuts reflect a similar spirit of experimentation. Munch often cut his blocks into puzzle-like pieces for different colors, inking them separately, and reassembling them for the final pull. His tools included gouges for making deep cuts into the wood, resulting in bold, expressive effects of

black and white. He also took advantage of the grain and imperfections of the wood itself in creating his images.

Munch and Gauguin shared a common friend—the English composer Frederick Delius (1862–1934). Delius was an art lover and in 1898 had purchased Gauguin’s important painting *Nevermore* from 1897. Gauguin’s first woodcuts were intended as illustrations for his Tahitian journal, *Noa Noa*, published in 1897. When the journal was published in book form in 1901, Delius and Munch learned about plans by others to adapt that exotic work into new forms of music, dance, and theater. This excitement about *Noa Noa* encouraged the two men to consider a collaboration with a writer on a work that would combine words, pictures, and music. Unfortunately, this project was never realized.

One of Munch’s most important relationships was with the English violinist Evangeline Hope Muddock (c. 1883–1953), whose stage name was Eva Mudocci. Attracted by Mudocci’s stunning appearance and musical talent, he portrayed her in *The Violin Concert*, *The Brooch*, and *Salomé*, three prints from 1903, the year in which they met. Composers, writers, and playwrights were also an important part of Munch’s circle going back to his earliest days in Kristiana (present day Oslo) and continuing during his stays in Paris and Berlin. The Swedish playwright August Strindberg often remarked that Munch’s art needed musical explanation—words alone were inadequate to do it justice.

Munch’s great legacy as an artist was the willingness and fearlessness with which he plunged into the depths of his life, soul, and psyche. He realized this when he wrote: “Just as Leonardo da Vinci studied the recesses of the human body and dissected cadavers, I try to dissect souls.” Like Leonardo, Munch’s achievements are indicative of a lifelong commitment to experimentation, variety of expression, and technical innovation. Unlike Leonardo, Munch’s held an unshakable belief in the primacy of his personal experiences and his relentless rumination on their universal significance. He wrote: “In my art I have tried to find an explanation for life and to discover its meaning. I also intended to help others understand life.”

Munch's art continues to give permission to younger artists to look inward, to scrutinize, analyze, and disentangle the sources of the complex emotions and motivations that make us human. From generation to generation, his message has resonated most with those who believe as he did that "all art, literature, and music must be produced with one's heart-blood. Art is the heart-blood of a person."

Bearing in mind the long-lasting influence of Edvard Munch on subsequent generations of artists, Håkon Austbø has chosen repertoire from four generations of Norwegian composers, each of whom studied with the former, thus forming an unbroken line of development.

Fartein Valen (1887–1952) was a younger contemporary of Munch (1863–1944) and a pupil of Edvard Grieg. Choosing not to follow closely in Grieg's footsteps, Valen was a true "internationalist," using elements from late German romanticism, and, later, from the Second Viennese school, as represented by Arnold Schoenberg (1874–1951). His personal atonal polyphonic style served him well throughout his career. His works are built on melodic motifs that are treated in reverse, diminution, or augmentation, and sometimes transposed. The theme of *Valse noble* is a twelve-tone row. It is a mosaic of voices in which the counterpoint is presented in continuously changing constellations, and the texture alternates between emotional density and poetic clarity.

Valen's pupil Klaus Egge explored a different path. In his first period, his works were directly or indirectly influenced by folk music, and he developed his own characteristic use of ecclesiastical modes combined with his own bold energy. Beginning with his *Second Symphony*, op. 22, and especially in his *Violin Concerto*, op. 26, Egge's style became less tonal and more markedly polyphonic. He began to integrate aspects of Valen's technique while maintaining his personal style of strong contrasts between marcato rhythmic passages and ethereal atmospheres, as in the second movement of his *Sonata Patética*, op. 27. The sonata is structurally and thematically complex, with powerful energy and deep emotional expression. Though folk music influences the work heavily, the music is simultaneously contemporary and cosmopolitan, similar to that of Béla Bartók (1881–1945).

Finn Mortensen wrote piano sonatas prolifically from his early period on: his *Sonata*, op. 7, was completed only one year after his teacher Egge had written his *Sonata no. 2*. These two sonatas, both from the 1950s, are perhaps the most important in the genre from this period in Norwegian music. Mortensen's work is much freer than Egge's, although the second movement fulfills the requirements of a fugue. "Quasi una fantasia" streams from an eruptive impulse, creating a swarm of clusters, dissonances, and trills. A nebula of diatonic scales surrounds the melodic second theme. The intervals of the fugue are stretched to seemingly impossible extremes, as an augmented octave is stretched out to a perfect eleventh. The contrapuntal figurations go continuously faster, supporting an unbearable crescendo, until the eruptions of the first movement return toward the end of the fugue. According to Håkon Austbø, "Mortensen uses extreme means in this work and he must have felt them well suited to my way of playing, since he had a strong wish that I should perform it. I did so at the Bergen International Festival in 1977."

Finn Mortensen began composition studies with Klaus Egge just before the outbreak of World War II. Like many of his countrymen, Mortensen joined the resistance, making studies impossible. After the war was over, he found himself drawn to the avant-garde activity that was going on among composers in Darmstadt and at Karlheinz Stockhausen's (1928–2007)

electronic studio in Cologne. Upon his return to Norway, Mortensen became a proponent of musical modernism. When Norway's State Academy of Music was established in 1974, Mortensen was appointed its first professor of composition. In this role he trained a new generation of Norwegian composers, of whom Rolf Wallin (b. 1957) is one of the most prominent. Wallin's musical voice is very personal, with a special harmonic color that emerges from mathematical calculations. In spite of the mathematics behind it, Wallin's music has a striking intuitive directness, exemplified by his *Seven Imperatives*. The model Wallin had in mind was Grieg's *Lyrical Pieces*, opp. 12, 38, 43, and 47. The titles of the *Seven Imperatives* are one-syllable, four-letter verbs that, when taken together, create a dramatic story, very precisely characterized in every movement.

In 2001 Håkon Austbø was the pianist for the world premiere performance of *Seven Imperatives* in Bergen, the home of Norway's Carte Blanche Dance Company, which commissioned the work.

Notes on Munch by David Gariff, Lecturer, National Gallery of Art
Program notes on composers by Håkon Austbø, translated by Kjell Wernøe,
Pro Arte, Norway

Next Week at the National Gallery of Art

Nordic Voices

Music by Lasse Thoresen
and other Norwegian composers

Presented in honor of *Edvard Munch: Master Prints*
and in conjunction with “Norway Comes to Washington”

October 10, 2010
Sunday Evening, 6:30 pm
East Building Auditorium



Gesangverein Hofbieber

Music by Hassler, Lechner,
and other Renaissance composers

October 13, 2010
Wednesday, 12:10 pm
West Building, West Garden Court

For the convenience of concertgoers
the Garden Café remains open until 6:00 pm.

The use of cameras or recording equipment during the
performance is not allowed. Please be sure that cell phones,
pagers, and other electronic devices are turned off.

Please note that late entry or reentry of
the West Building after 6:30 pm is not permitted.

Music Department
National Gallery of Art
Sixth Street and Constitution Avenue NW
Washington, DC

www.nga.gov

COVER: Edvard Munch, *The Brooch (Eva Mudocci)*, 1903,
National Gallery of Art, Washington, Gift of the Epstein Family Collection